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SERMON XXII.

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RELATION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE TO HEAVEN.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—2 TIM. xiv: 7, 8.

Some definite connection between his present and his future life was doubtless apprehended by the apostle when he penned this exultant language. He was then standing on the verge of time. Eternity was before him. He looked backward over an eventful career, and forward to his sure inheritance. In these comprehensive and glowing words he sums up his Christian course and anticipates the immediate possession of his crown. The two are brought so nearly together in this brief summary of his life, and in this expressed assurance of heaven, that they suggest an intimate relation between them. It is as if he had said: my fight well fought, my course finished, and my faith kept, are to make brighter and richer my crown of righteousness. His faith, his activity, and his consuming zeal were to augment his weight of glory. The accumulated treasures of

his life of faith here were to enter into and expand his life of fruition there. I think it may be stated as a principle, that the relation of the present to the heavenly state is such that heaven will be more or less according to the depth and tone of Christian life. If that life be low and poor, heaven will be less; but if it be high and rich, heaven will be more to us. *The relation of life to heaven*, or the bearing of the earthly upon the heavenly state of the redeemed, therefore, is a subject of infinite importance.

A broad, earnest, and spiritual Christian Life will secure to him who lives it superior and extraordinary advantages in heaven.

By *breadth of Christian life*, I mean an appropriation by the soul to Christian ends of all that a man can know and feel and do. Such a life absorbs into itself all the truth, experience and activities within the limits of the soul's capacity by consecrating them to Christ. It commands and employs, it elevates and sanctifies all the pursuits and experiences proper to man as man. Not religion exclusively, but business, learning, labor, pleasure, art, society, are adapted and designed to feed and enlarge the Christian life, and should be so employed as to develop their religious possibilities. Religion has the authority to subject all these to itself that they may minister to the accomplishment of its mission. A true Christian life, in addition to its strictly divine element, must embrace and gather into itself all proper secular relations and employments and make them divine.

It must moreover be *earnest* to be genuine. It must be an intensive life. The Christian must live so voluntarily and so consciously as to live for a purpose. To that religious purpose all his resources must contribute. You know what an earnest life is. You know how your energies have been fired by some inspiring object—money, position, fame, friend, loved one, or some other object you were determined to gain. Nothing hindered you. You heeded no obstacle. You knew no fatigue. Day and night alike witnessed your eternal vigilance. Your will was unconquerable and your zeal was ever blazing along your fiery way. You authoritatively called into requisition all collateral aids and concentrated everything you possessed and touched upon the attainment of your purpose. This is what I mean by an earnest life. A like convergence of energies and resources to Christian ends constitutes an earnest Christian life.

The salvation of men and personal holiness are the one grand object of all Christian life: *Spirituality* therefore is its most essential element. The soul must be lifted into communion with God. To have fellowship with him, to work with him, like Enoch, to dwell with him, as did David, must be the Christian's longing desire. Spiritual exercises must be his accustomed de-

light. Prayer must be the joy of his soul. God's word must be sweet to his taste, "sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb." God's house he must love to frequent, and with his people evermore be glad to dwell. The duties of religion he must not shun. From its sacrifices he must not shrink. He must endure its crosses. A life of faith and worship and work, holding him ever near to God, he must not fail to lead.

Such a broad, earnest, spiritual life here will secure us more of heaven than we should gain if our lives were less and lower than this.

But what do we mean by saying that some will have a better and an ample heaven than others? It must not be denied that heaven will be to all its inhabitants a full and overflowing provision for the soul. It will furnish all the enjoyments to every redeemed spirit that its capacity can crave. To a given extent, heaven will be the same to all its unnumbered millions. Its constituent elements will make it a realm of wondrous delight to all gathered in its mansions. Its purity, its love, its glories, the freedom of the soul, the divine employments, growth, nearness to the Redeemer, its worships—all an eternally conscious inheritance—these all must realize in that world of blessedness, for these make up the staple of heaven. Here is a level below which none shall fall, a radiant plane upon which all the saved shall find a home.

But heaven has resources of happiness beyond the capacity of any of the redeemed to exhaust. The patriarchs who have been there for six thousand years, and the Apostles who entered it so much in advance of the patriarchs—in advance as to fitness for large enjoyment, though, as touching time, four thousand years later—are as far from reaching the topmost heights of glory, toward which they have been ascending so long, as the infant spirit which Jesus has taken to his arms in Heaven to-day. These mighty saints who have gone before, though they are to mount up on pinions of love and worship and joy forever, yet forever will have an untraveled, infinite distance to scale before they reach the highest table-lands of heaven. God is infinite. God has made heaven like himself, exhaustless in its sources of happiness. He has not fitted up our celestial abode on any plan of narrow human economy. It is his own dwelling place. As man would do in his frugal spirit, God has not furnished Heaven with only just enough of joy to meet the average wants of the race in fear a surplus would be wasted, but he has supplied it with such an abundance, that, while all His redeemed ones in their eternally increasing capacity shall be satisfied, there shall remain unused a supply absolutely infinite! And yet there is no waste. God himself fills all these otherwise unoccupied spaces in the heavenly world. God must have a heaven as well

as man. His must be a boundless heaven. Blessed be God, His and ours are the same.

This heaven is more to one than to another because one has more capacity for its enjoyment than another. The sun sheds light enough for all, yet there is more of it to a man of perfect vision than to one whose sight is defective. The landscape has glories unchangably its own, yet one it inspires with no emotion, while another it thrills with delight. Yonder gallery of paintings has in fact but one invariable degree of excellence and power to charm, yet while multitudes pass amid its wonders unarrested and almost unmoved, a few stand in the presence of those master-pieces spell-bound and transfixed with admiration. These different effects lie solely in difference of capacity. Heaven must be more to the soul of great capacity than it can be to one of weak and undeveloped powers. Such a life as I have described is God's method of increasing our capacity, hence of giving us superior and extraordinary advantages in heaven.

No one would think of disputing the power of such a life to increase our capacity here. It is a law of the soul that it enlarges under training. The end of all educational processes is to expand and strengthen our powers. For this reason you place your children in schools. That the mind may burst its confining shell and emerge into freedom and breadth of thought, you give yourself to study. For your profession, your trade, your business, you prepare yourself by protracted and severe discipline. Since you have become a merchant, a mechanic, a lawyer, an artist, you have risen higher and higher in your position because your life in your sphere has been earnest and single. You can give a better diagnosis, make a better argument, discourse sweeter music than you could once, because you have kept yourself in training. The soul that really lives must make a larger and still larger place for itself. Its eye must drink in the glories of an ever expanding horizon. The accumulated resources of one period are carried forward into another. Nothing is lost. All antecedents contribute to the formation of character. In an eminent degree character at any period of ones existence is the result of living. It depends upon the forces lifting the soul onward. Original or organic diversities do not contravene this law. They only increase or diminish the results of its operation. Earnest living can accomplish more in connection with a naturally strong character than with a naturally weak one. This is a trueism. But by this living and by the attainment of one period augmenting those of another, human capacity, whatever its original germ, is ever enlarging in this world.

I admit there are certain conditions of being growing out of sin which seem to oppose this principle. In the weakness and wasting of sickness and old age the whole character seems to

sink with the body. It does manifestly sink and rise with the physical condition, but while this proves a mysterious and dependent union of the soul with the body, it does not indicate such an interlacing and blending of the two as to make the ultimate fate of both alike. One is mortal; the other immortal. One must sink back to dust from which it came; the other must rise superior to all decay. The soul may be crippled and dragged down for a time, but it can not always partake of corporeal weakness. If immortal it must have a life and status of its own. Remove it from its condition of dependence upon the body and the soul must assert itself in the combined majesty of its native and accumulated strength. Immortality can lose nothing. Its growth and gathered power shall survive the shock of death. There is nothing in the nature of earthly dissolution to abridge the soul. To die is only to break the cage and let the prisoner go free; to cut the soul from the moorings of time for a free career over the ocean of eternity; to detach its earthly weight that it may rise strongly and forever up to the heights of glory. If this be the law of immortality, that living increases its measure and power, and that it can lose nothing in time or in eternity, nothing by the pressure of bodily infirmity and nothing by the wasting desolation of death, then it is a matter of infinite concern how well and how much we live as Christians. But I need not deal in hypotheses. Such is the love of growth. Its operation is seen in both worlds. But I am contemplating its results in the other. A great American orator has eloquently said, "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. But if we work upon immortal minds—if we imbue them with high principles, with the just fear of God and their fellow men, we engrave on these tables something which no time can efface, but which will brighten to all eternity." What is true of our discipline of other minds is true of the discipline of our own. If by prayer and faith we walk with God; if from love to souls, we work for the salvation of men; if moved by the kindly humanities of the gospel, we do good to the race; if we consecrate all our affairs and pursuits to Christ and to his cause; if we hunger and thirst after righteousness, and drink deeper and deeper into the truth as it is in Jesus; if we learn all things at the foot of the Cross, and receive our inspiration from the Holy Ghost; if we rise to a plane of thought and experience in our christian life so lofty and so near to our Saviour that the evening twilight of our earthly existence blends with the morn of our life in glory, then shall we stand at once upon a vantage-ground in heaven from which we shall begin our journey through eternity with far higher hopes and larger prospects than if we had barely obtained an entrance through the gates into the city. After such

living, such divine living in Christ Jesus, after such vigorous and intense life in the Son of God, we shall mount on bolder wings, reach loftier heights, see grander visions, and taste nobler joys in the heavenly world.

In my further treatment of this subject I desire to present some of the points which illustrate the heavenly benefits of such a life.

Such a life prepares the soul upon its first entrance for a *higher position* in heaven. Said once an earnest preacher, when urging upon his hearers the duty of making the most of their opportunities, "I desire to enter the University of Heaven in advance." As this language implies, we are now in a preparatory school. The higher institution is beyond. But an advanced entrance into this heavenly university does not depend upon freedom from sinfulness and guilt alone. In this respect all must be alike. All must be cleansed by the blood of Christ. But this advanced entrance into heaven requires an increased capacity for enjoyment, which depends upon spiritual experiences as well as upon moral purity. Degrees of happiness in heaven are not based upon the absence of guilt, nor upon social distinctions, but upon diversities of knowledge and experience, which there prevail as here. All in heaven are holy and constitute one loving brotherhood, but all have not made equal progress. Why should they? Men here differ in ability, in attainment, in breadth. Why should they not differ there touching those points in which it is not the law of heaven to be alike? It is not questioned that these striking discriminations go down with men to the grave. Why not farther? You see a multitude of Christians just at the margin of the dark river ready to cross to the heavenly side. Except in moral fitness for heaven, they are totally unequal. There is the young convert; weak, uninstructed and undisciplined. God is calling him home in the early dawn of his religious life. He has all his Christian growth to make on the other side. There is the saint of feeble and untried intellect, but none the less an heir of the kingdom, being washed in the blood of the Lamb. He has done but little for Christ. He is scarcely able to give a reason for the hope within him. He has scarcely had the shadow of a conception of the plan of salvation. Then there is the mighty man of God. He has drunk deeply into the wells of eternal truth. He has compassed the vast themes of the gospel. His strong soul, by a mastering faith, has taken hold on God and made Him his Eternal Rock. Divine verities are the ever living sources of his being. The history of Christ's Kingdom, its conflicts, its victories, the moral forces and the men that have gathered its shining trophies, its promises, its prospects and its glories, are all familiar to him. He has lived for many years in the ardent and rapturous anticipation of heaven. Heaven has been to him a

present reality. He has caught glimpses of its real glory through its gates standing ajar by faith. He has heard with delight its strains of inspiring melody, and has felt its celestial breezes wafted down upon his soul. Now, I ask, what is there in death to make these three men just alike in their capacity for heaven. There is nothing. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory." Other things being equal, this difference will depend upon the Christian life. It is true, life abounding in the most vigorous and with the purest Christian activities, that which educates the soul by the most rigid Christian discipline, does not promise, nor has it the ability, to supply what was originally wanting. It can not give a weak man the strength of a strong one. A strong man may attain the same position in heaven in a much shorter process of training than a weak one. Some men of vast powers, going to heaven immediately upon their conversion, may take in more of it at once than can other and weaker men who have spent a long life-time in preparation. When heaven is reached and entered, whether after a remote or a recent regeneration, the soul is at once filled. How much it can hold depends upon its size. But since capacity depends upon original endowment and general culture as well as upon Christian living, it does not follow from the view taken, that he who has lived the best and the most active Christian life will of necessity have more of heaven than he who falls below him in these high qualities. The man of poorer Christian life may have much more capacity to develop. It is not always those of our schools who study the closest and the most hours that take the highest honors. There is the vital question of ability lying back of study. But starting equally, the most diligent student wins the laurels. And often, because of greater assiduity, when rivals do not start equally, when one is far less favored in native powers than the other, the weaker will distance the stronger so that the stronger shall at length become the weaker; and the one of poorer and lower original endowments will attain a wealth of character, a greatness of capacity and a splendor of renown which the one of more favored birth will never reach. So many a Christian of naturally impoverished intellect, because of his ardent devotion to God, of his unflagging efforts to save his fellowmen, and of his all-mastering and intense discipline of himself, shall have a greatness and a glory in heaven, far below that which shall fall, because of their unfaithful lives, upon multitudes on whom nature has lavished her greatest wealth of mind. But the real question we are considering with reference to the benefits of a Christian life relates not so much to a comparison between two or more persons, as to a comparison between the possible states of the same soul in

heaven as determined by the life here. If one must live here and pass through a season of probation—I do not say it is better than to die when grace first converts the soul—it makes a vast difference in his heaven at last whether he grows here or not, whether he leads a broad and thoroughly Christian life, or one that is narrow and heedless and secular. His life here will determine whether he shall at once mount, as with the swift flight of the eagle, to the summits of the heavenly glory, or whether he shall timidly crawl up to the pavements of the celestial city, like a mole blinded by the soil in which it has burrowed. Your earthly life must in a great measure settle whether you shall just reach heaven by the extremest chance, and lie jaded and panting on the threshold of its porch, scarcely able from weakness to surmount it, or whether you shall go bounding through vestibule and arch past the vast crowds whose places shall be lower than your own, to some shining seat in the celestial mansions. It is no mark of piety to pray for an humble place in heaven. We have no Scriptural authority or example for having such a desire. Such a sentiment has its philosophy in a morbid condition of soul, or in a spirit of slothfulness. It indicates a kind of humility which is uninstructed and may savor more of cant than of piety. When I am released from this body of sin and death, I desire to occupy as high a place in heaven as the discipline of life shall fit me for; and may that discipline be such that an abundant entrance shall be administered unto me. I desire a high seat in the galleries of eternity, so as at once to have,

“ Bright glories rush upon my sight,
And charm my wondering eyes—
The regions of immortal light,
The beauties of the skies.”

Another benefit which a full Christian life in this world will afford us in the future will consist in the *increased facilities it will give for progress in heaven*. Need I pause at all to discuss this question of progress hereafter? The Bible conception of heaven leaves no room for doubt upon this subject. The Scriptures nowhere intimate that the blessed abode of the saints is a place of stationary rest, or one alone of joyous songs. The nature of the soul and its laws of happiness certainly contradict this theory. I think many of our notions of heaven and of our fancied adaptations to the heavenly state are the birth of mystic dreaming and the offspring of indolent sentiment. Each man's conception of heaven is likely to receive shape from his condition here. The soul that ardently loves, whose flow of happiness has been unbroken, conceives of social reunions and of heavenly fellowships as the exclusive happiness of the redeemed. Those of strong but blighted domestic attachments and relations long for a place

where these powers shall have full and unbroken play. Parents, companions and lovers, whose dear ones death has smitten, will look forward with tearful expectation and glowing hearts to the other side where,

"Those who meet shall part no more,
And those long parted meet again."

The Christian whose skies have always frowned upon him in anger and storm, whose life has been one of exhaustive toil and sorrow, looks for a heaven in which his soul shall have peace and his worn powers can repose, where "The wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." The Christian who has been active, hopeful and happy here, looks forward to his brighter home as one in which his freed soul shall never feel a fetter or a weight, where his unloosened tongue shall sing without a faltering note, and his buoyant heart leap upward along the ascending scale of spiritual progress forever. What is grateful dreams of perpetuity hereafter, and what is unwelcome longs to be reversed hereafter. All of these ideal phases of heaven which experience here places before the longing vision of our faith and which fill in so good a degree the measure of our hopes, will doubtless be realized, for in our Father's house are many mansions. But with regard to this idea of heaven which necessitates a law of progress, I think we may allow ourselves the largest freedom and the strongest emphasis in its utterance. If the soul, while here repressed as it is by the burdens of bodily infirmity, contending with myriads of opposing powers, blinded and enfeebled by sin, and able to catch but the faintest and most transient glimpses of the divine character, is, while under such partial and weakened inspiration, continually deepening and widening its religious experience, enlarging and perfecting its Christian character, freeing and rejuvenating its crippled faculties, and mounting up higher and higher still the shining way, what shall we say of a soul in Heaven, cut loose from all fleshy clogs, clothed with a spiritual body like Christ's, and in a condition which is refining, electrifying and endowing with the greatest elasticity, widest freedom and strongest motive power, all its susceptibilities? What shall we say of such a soul as to progress? It has no barriers to leap, no fetters to burst, no weights to carry. Such a soul, so lifted up and so divinely moved to range over the broad sweeps and to career along the shining heights of glory, to behold the wondrous works and to take in the mighty truths of God, to look upon Jesus without an intervening veil and to be one with Him for all eternity, must have a progress commensurate with its own nature, and with its marvelous conditions and facilities of growth. Such a soul must grow. It can not be contained within narrow or within any fixed limits. It is immortal and unfettered, and, heated all aglow with the fervors of divine

love, it will grow forever. The soul can not remain stationary in heaven. God will never put a withering hand upon its progress. Such a thought we can not endure. All nature, all reason, all consciousness, all the witnessing of God, tell us the soul must grow. We can not, we will not believe it will ever cease to grow. Where is Gabriel? Has he soared no higher than he was when God first fledged him and plumed his infant pinions? Think it not. Where is Elijah? Is he no farther on than when his mantle fell back from his flaming chariot as it struck the pavement of the New Jerusalem. Think it not. Where is Paul? Is he no more advanced than when his soul first leaped up to Heaven through the curling flames of his martyred body? Think it not. These all are pursuing those who went before. Where are the pious of successive ages who have died in the faith? All are in Heaven, following each other on, mounting higher and higher toward the reachless possibilities of the redeemed state. We hope soon to be where they are now. From one step to another we shall ascend the ladder of glorious vision, but its topmost round we can never reach because its height is infinite.

In the beginning of this heavenly growth our life here is able to give the soul an infinite advantage. If a proper Christian life helps a soul to enter Heaven in advance, then it starts on its track of progress in advance. As it starts it will ever hold on its way. By how much higher is its first place in glory, by so much will its height be increased through all eternity—an increased height which could never have been maintained but for this advanced beginning. And if progress there is rapid in proportion to the position which the soul first assumes, and to the strength with which it begins, how is the importance of Christian life here enhanced? And if this progress be in geometrical instead of simple ratio, and if in our advanced state the sympathies and companionships of enlarged souls vastly accelerate our growth in the future world, then can we never estimate the stupendous value of a noble Christian life. If it lift us but to one better view of God, if it give us but one truer conception of His character, but one higher joy, one small fraction of increased capacity, and bring us but one step nearer our Lord and Redeemer, our life here pledges us an increased progress in heaven as to knowledge, happiness, spirituality, and enlarged views of God, which shall go on compounding its ratio of advancing movement eternally! Brethren, if we are to live here at all as Christians, let us not wrong our souls for eternity by living poorly. An unworthy Christian life will cripple, and burden, and hold back the soul forever.

A good Christian life here will furnish us in heaven with *grateful memories, and perpetuate those grateful associations* which have had their origin in our present Christian activities.

The more we do here for God, the more will our hearts be

filled with joy by its remembrance. I have no doubt that memory will be vastly quickened and strengthened in the world to come. As it will add to the miseries of the lost, so it will minister to the joys of the saved. It is as Coleridge says :

“ Time, as he courses onwards, still unrolls
 The volume of concealment. In the future,
 As in the opticians glassy cylinder,
 The undistinguishable blots and colors
 Of the dim past collect and shape themselves,
 Upstarting in their own completed image,
 To scare, or to reward.”

But while the good which we have done as Christians on earth will be lived over again in heaven, the evil which we have done will be so blotted from God’s remembrance as not to stir remorseful recollections in our own bosoms. We can never forget that we have served God here. We love his service, his house, our privileges ; we pray, we study the Word of God, we point sinners to the Lamb of God, we help weak saints along their journey, we do good as we find opportunity. Of all this we think but little now, but in the world to come all of these services, poor and imperfect as they are, will afford us most blessed memories. As we here glory even in tribulation, if Christ be honored, so there we shall rejoice evermore that we have been counted worthy to suffer for his sake. In part, at least, by the office of memory, our present light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Unless memory bears us testimony that we have faithfully labored and willingly suffered for Christ in this world, we can not so eminently enjoy him in the next. The more of good we crowd into this life, the more of heaven will be given us in precious memories :

“ For can the wiles of art, the grasp of power,
 Snatch the rich relics of a well-spent hour ?
 These, when the trembling spirit wings her flight,
 Pour round her path a stream of living light ;
 And gild those pure and perfect realms of rest,
 Where virtue triumphs, and her sons are blest.”

Those associations which we form here through Christian knowledge and communion will be perpetuated in heaven. I know it is said, and with the semblance of great piety, that in heaven we shall be so absorbed in the contemplation of Christ and his glory, that we shall take no note of friends gone before or of saints of whom we have heard. It is true Christ will be our great theme. We shall cast our crowns at his feet in adoring wonder and love, and shall worship the Lamb forever. But do you suppose the worship of God there will set aside the communion of saints any more than it does here ? Heaven is a com-

munity. It would be a happy place if there were but one there. But an innumerable company is there. Why are the saints together, if not to enjoy the blessings incident to communities? There is room enough in God's universe for each redeemed soul to have a heaven for itself separate and walled. But we are to be together. We shall hear each other sing. We shall try each other's harps. We shall range arm in arm over the bright plains of bliss. Yes, we shall enjoy the communion of saints. Why not? If memory there is so indefinitely strengthened and so intensely minute that we shall call up all the blessed communions of earth and rejoice over them, shall we, can we forget, or be indifferent to, those redeemed ones now by our side in glory, whose earthly memories we so fondly cherish? Shall we cease to remembor them now, while they are infinitely more lovely and attractive than when scarred and blighted by sin? We have no warrant for concluding that the privileges and blessings which pertain to associations will be held in abeyance in heaven. You will recognize your friends there. Your grateful companionships will be renewed. Your departed loved ones you will see and embrace again. All of these Christian communions here will be perpetuated as blessed memories, so as to enlarge our enjoyments in heaven. I desire more Christian fellowship here. I desire to know more humble saints here. I desire to know more great and good men here. I desire to learn all I can about the pious of past ages, that hereafter I may commune with those great lights of the church that for centuries have been blazing in heaven. As I contemplate it, heaven is more attractive to me in that I shall behold and have fellowship with Abraham, and Noah, and Elijah, and David, and Paul, and Chrysostom, and Latimer, and Luther, and Judson, and Payson, and Summerfield. To fall before Christ with these eminent saints, and with them ascribe my salvation to his infinite and eternal grace, and with them and myriads more bloodwashed and saved forever worship the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world for my sins, will increase the joys of heaven for me.

Another extraordinary advantage secured to the soul hereafter, by an eminent christian life here, is its *reward* which God will bestow.

Whether or not we can perceive the consistency of heavenly rewards with the doctrines of grace, we can not deny that the Scriptures teach their bestowal. It is as plainly taught that God will reward the faithful with eternal blessings as that salvation is the gift of his sovereign and unmerited grace. The promises of such reward in the addresses to the Asiatic churches can not be misunderstood. In varied forms of expression eternal life is herein pledged, and that, too, as a reward of faithful living. Saint John is very emphatic in assuring those churches that

christian life, in the forms of conflict and struggle, shall be rewarded if faithful. To the Ephesian church he represents the Spirit as saying: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." To the church in Smyrna it is said: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The church in Pergamos is addressed: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." To another church it is spoken: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and I will give him the morning star."

In other forms, substantially the same promise of eternal life as a reward of overcoming faithfulness is made to each of the other churches. In the writings of the evangelists also this doctrine of heavenly rewards is most amply taught. And moreover our Lord himself in closing his beatitudes says, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, for great is your reward in heaven." We are told too that we shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body; that they that have done good shall receive blessings, and they that have done evil shall receive condemnation. We are assured that even a cup of cold water given as an act of Christian charity shall not loose its reward. Whether these rewards in heaven consist in the direct and conscious approval of God upon the soul that has served him faithfully, or in an enlarged capacity for enjoyment, or in both, the rewards must be proportionate to the life. I believe that the Redeemer will bestow special favor upon those who have loved him most and served him best.

There is something in human consciousness that intuitively claims a reward for service. I do not say we can establish a claim to compensation from God for service. He has a right to command and use us without compensation; and in consequence we have no reason to expect a gracious requital at his hand. But God has neither exercised his original right to withhold all rewards, nor has he refused to graciously crown our service with his favor because we have sinned. He recognizes and honors the feeling of our hearts which longs for requital. He tramples down no constitutional element of our nature. How far this expectation of a reward may influence us as a motive without marring our piety, I can not tell. But to him who loves God in sincerity and delights to serve him, no danger can come from his having respect unto the recompence of reward. God's chosen Leader of Israel had this reward in his eye, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater

riches than the treasures of Egypt, because he looked forward to a sure recompense. That forecasting of Moses did not vitiate his piety. He expected a reward for all his love and work and suffering. He has it. A higher place in glory awaited the dying sage in Moab than he would have reached had he remained the humble herdsman of Jethro's flocks. So with the great Apostle to the Gentiles. He looked forward to his crown. When in prison, suffering shipwreck, bleeding under stripes, in perils by land and by sea and amid false brethren, when workings and weeping for Jesus, how sweet to behold by faith his reward in heaven! How this reward nerved him for his duties, trials and life-struggles! Remember it was in full view of his heavenly inheritance when there came up from his rapturous soul and leaped from his glowing lips these exultant words: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Our blessed Lord himself, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame, in his dreadful passion, had regard to the satisfaction which he was promised as a reward of the travail of his soul. We instinctively look forward to our reward. God allows it. God encourages it. He graciously meets us at the point of our longing. Our every prayer shall be remembered. Every tear shed over the desolation of Zion or over souls lost and perishing shall be remembered. Every virtue practiced, every duty done, every act of love to God and of humanity to man, every trial endured and every heart-throb for Jesus, shall be remembered. In the final summing up of our lives here, God will forget nothing. No service, no suffering, no success, no feeling shall be overlooked—all shall be remembered and rewarded. The most faithful here will have an extraordinary measure of God's favor bestowed upon them in heaven as a reward.

And yet in these rewards promised to faithful Christian living there is nothing inconsistent with the highest doctrines of grace. The very works which God is pleased to reward are the effects of his grace upon the heart. All rewards to guilty and imperfect creatures, as all Christians are, owe their bestowal to the mediation of Christ. All they do is remembered for his sake. There is no service so imperfect or so small that God will not reward it for Jesus' sake. At the last Great Day those who are saved will know and feel that their salvation is all of grace, and yet that their crowns of glory are placed upon their heads by the Great Crowner as a reward of their overcoming faith.

We have endeavored to show that a true Christian Life in this world will vastly enrich our Heavenly inheritance. We have endeavored also to indicate, set forth, and impress upon your souls, some of the respects in which your future glory shall be weightier, richer and more resplendent by reason of this proper,

earnest and eminent christian living here. We have endeavored moreover to demonstrate that the relation of *Christian Life* to heaven is a subject of most attractive, most precious and most momentous concern, in that **LIVING** has the power to enlarge and enrich our heaven in a ratio whose degree and vastness the arithmetic of eternity alone can compute.

My brethren, with what interest and responsibility do these views invest life ! How all are encouraged to live well ! The amplest and richest heaven, by God's grace, may grow out of earthly poverty and obscurity. Talent, position, and renown here, are not needed to give promise of superior enfranchisement hereafter. It only requires faithful living in our appointed sphere to reach an imperial height in the world to come. From whatever earthly conditions taken up to our celestial home, this consecrated living for God, rather than any princely investiture of fortune, is our patent of heavenly nobility and our passport and welcome to the high circles in glory. May we so live ! When we come to the verge of the eternal world, may we gather up the great results of such a life and carry them forward to enrich our eternal treasure in the Paradise of God.

SERMON XXIII.

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MARTHA AND MARY.

"And Jesus answered, and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."—Luke x: 41, 42.

THIS occurred in the family which Jesus loved. The household is better known than any which the Lord frequented. Every member of it is described, and each character stands out so prominently, that Martha and Mary and Lazarus their brother have become representatives of humanity in all succeeding ages. It is always thus in the gospel ; we are taught by action rather than precepts, shown lives rather than creeds ; for the good news is not of an abstract salvation, but of a living Saviour ; and the pictures given us of this circle of love, to which the Redeemer was wont to resort, are designed, not alone to beautify the narrative, but for our edification.

Let us then : I. Seek to understand the two characters mentioned in the text. II. Deduce the lessons from these words of Jesus.

I. We must not imagine that Mary was the only believer of the two. In the eleventh chapter of John's gospel, we are told expressly that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," and in the same chapter there is recorded a confession of her faith in him. Both loved the Lord—both were Christians, though the piety of Mary was of a higher type.

It has been common to use the latter part of the text as an appeal to choose Christ above all earthly things, since "one thing is needful." The force of such an admonition is not lessened, but increased, by clearly apprehending the truth in the case ; and it is a great injustice to the memory of an earnest Christian woman, whose hospitality the Master was accustomed to enjoy, for any of his ministers to misrepresent her, that they may use a text the more readily. Both believed on the guest, who was at their house in Bethany that day ; the contrast is between the two kinds of piety. We can present it the more clearly, since there is so much told us by all the Evangelists about the members of the family.

About their worldly circumstances we do not know very much. They certainly had many friends, who came to their house when the brother died, which would not have been the case, if they had been very poor ; and the younger sister was able to have a box of very precious ointment. Nor could they have been very rich, else Bethany would scarcely have been their place of residence, and the Lord so frequent a guest. They were, like the majority of us, able to entertain, yet not accustomed to keep a retinue of servants, and thus dispense with all personal inconvenience in doing so. Martha was undoubtedly the elder sister, for it is said that *she* "received Him into her house" and that "she had a sister." The care of the house naturally fell upon her, and she was actively engaged, in preparing the meal for the company, which, whether it included the disciples or not, was large enough to occasion her some anxiety. Perhaps her affection for Jesus made her all the more "careful" in providing for him, just as the presence of an honored guest still does in well-nigh every household. It is not to her discredit in our ordinary esteem. It is precisely the natural, womanly feeling of the mistress of the family ; and the Scriptures are true to the life in this narrative, giving us to understand that human nature was the same then as now. Although it became the policy of the church as it declined in piety to represent the early believers as saints so lifted above the common level, that we might despair of equalling them ; the gospel shows us, that the people our Lord met and blessed, who loved him and were loved by him, were just such people as we are, and as we meet every day.

Like a prudent, and perhaps, proud housekeeper, Martha, was all activity, "cumbered about much serving." Her sister "sat at Jesus' feet," and heard his word. Martha, the true representative of bustling people, was not satisfied with this ; she was at work herself, and must needs see Mary as busy as she. And she therefore comes to the Lord, whom she knew well enough to trouble thus, and says, "Lord, does thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone ? Bid her therefore that she help me." What a blessed thing it is ! that Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, can come into a family ; that he, though the Almighty God, is so revealed to us, that we conceive of his nearness to us in circumstances like these ! Not too dignified, too unsympathizing to be spoken to about such petty household cares. It is true she was rebuked, but very kindly, and though he did reprove her, it shows what a gentle, lowly, winning man he was, that she was not afraid to bring this little home difficulty to him. And this same man is now at God's right hand, asking us to put our trust in him for life and death, for time and eternity ; and some of you will not do it, though you know he died to save you, as he died to save Martha, that active, anxious, perplexed woman !

He saw that she was too much concerned about mere externals—mere food for the body, may have detected a vain spirit at the bottom of her zeal, may have known that she expected commendation for her great activity : certainly he saw that she was not so truly desirous of serving him, with all her "much serving," as the gentler, quieter one who sat listening to his words. And he therefore answers in the language of the text, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things ; but one thing is needful ; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." It was kindly done, and she did not murmur, did not cease to love him. She was full of work ; Mary, full of affection : and the one who did and said least was the more pious. We may fancy we are working, because we love Christ, when we only work, because we love to be busy, to have the excitement of doing, which is a pleasure in itself—or from some other motive which is not Christian, though the object for which we labor be the best one imaginable. This is a direct blow at a species of activity that is very common, wherein people justify certain things that are of doubtful morality, because they are to aid a religious object ; or if not this, yet think that all labor for the temporal interests of the church, or for benevolent enterprises, is necessarily a "good work." In all kindness, let it be remarked that this is a species of Pharisaism. Right glad we are to have zealous, capable helpers, but because we have so many such, who are not truly

pious, it is the more necessary that this text should be used to warn you against supposing that this is real Christianity; or if you are Christians, that this is the highest style of piety. Our gratitude, for all the kind offices thus rendered makes us the more anxious to tell you the truth. The Saviour thus spoke to Martha, because he loved her and did not want her to go astray.

Mary drank in the Saviour's words, showed her affection by keeping near him, was gaining strength to serve him by listening to him. It can not be said that she was lacking in willingness to do for him, because she was not so busy as her sister. After events prove that she was the better Christian, that she had a firmer hold of the truth, was more devotedly attached to Jesus. The "one thing needful" to which she clung, while her sister was clinging to other things also, was the Lord, as her personal friend and Redeemer. If we love him, then we will serve him best, for a mere natural earnestness will not stand the test that affection will. I have said Mary's superior faith and devotion were proven. When their brother Lazarus died and Jesus came to see them, although Martha, as might be expected from her character, was the first to meet him, she expressed most doubt, while Mary only wept, and it was Mary's tears, we are told, that called forth answering drops of grief from the eyes that now look down from heaven upon us. It was when she came, that "Jesus wept." Oh, my friends, here is another revelation of sympathy, and yet some of you will not have this Saviour.

And this is not all. After this Mary's name stands first when the sisters are spoken of. The reason is, that but a few days before his death, within the week which witnessed those events that darkened the sun, to give light to us, he sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper. The sisters were there. "Martha served"—but what did Mary do? She came with "an alabaster box of very precious ointment," and poured it on his head. Its value we learn from the murmurs of Judas, the traitor, that it was not sold and given to the poor. What serving at the table or in the household, would compare with this lavish gift—anointing him for his burial. There are those still, who think gifts for the service of the Lord can be too costly, and murmur also about the poor. Such is not the teaching of the Scriptures nor of a grateful soul. This act he calls "a good work." He leaves the poor, whom we have always with us, for us to feed; but he was then to go from them, and she with the instinct of a loving heart knew that but little time was left for her to show her devotion to the dear flesh of that Lord, and she poured upon it her costly gifts. It doubtless cost her much. It was not the overflowing of abundance, not such service as we often render,

that stints us in nothing, that is never felt; but so worthy, so manifest a token of her love was it, that the Lord replied "Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." Not even the Maty, who has been exalted to divine honors by a corrupt church, ever received such a testimony from the Son of God as this. And it has been told, John, who wrote his gospel some time after the others, when he begins to tell of the raising of Lazarus, not only mentions Mary first, but says, in parenthesis—for he had not yet reached that point of his narrative—that it was this Mary, already so well known to all Christians, of whom he spoke. The Judgment of the Lord has been confirmed; here, to-day, where this is "told of her" again. Those are the best Christians, who are nearest the Lord, love him most, and hence listen to him most attentively, make most sacrifices for him. These have "chosen the good part which can not be taken away," while those who are bustling, anxious about worldly things, even when seeming to serve the Lord, should heed the caution here given, lest in their over-anxiety about lesser concerns, they let go their hold of the "one thing needful."

II. Let us now seek to learn the appropriate lessons from this narrative. Some have been hinted at, others readily suggest themselves.

1. Observe, the fault of Martha was not the doing, but the over-doing of that which in itself was perfectly proper. She ought to have prepared the meal, as mistress of the family, but there was no necessity for her being "cumbered" with "so much serving." She thought it of more importance to serve up her table handsomely, than to hear the words of eternal life; else she would not have tried to get Mary away from the feet of the Saviour. This is the key to her character. She must of necessity take care about "many things," but she ought not to have been "careful and troubled" about them. There are many things that ought to be done and well done, many interests that are very important for men and women to attend to. Such attention is wrong only when it is not properly subordinated to the greatest interest, the "one thing needful." In their circumstances of imperfect knowledge of Christian truth, it was vastly more important that they should hear the word which would be meat and drink for their souls, than to sit down to a more bountiful repast than usual.

Let none infer from this, that they should cease to be busy about any worthy object; that they should stop laboring or giving for the externals of the church, or working and praying for the cause of the country. The text no more discourages such

things, than the command, "Be careful for nothing," forbids a man to provide by honest effort for himself and family. Let none of you who have hitherto resembled Martha, fold your hands and become no more like Mary, the gentle, loving, self-sacrificing Christian, by ceasing to be like the busy sister.

Martha still served, as the history tells us, but we do not read that she was again so "cumbered." We ought to do our duty in the family, in the church, in the nation, faithfully and zealously. Christianity makes better fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, better citizens and patriots—eventually at least, if it be genuine—but never at the expense of piety. We will render all kinds of service more fully, as we live more, even as Mary did; and no service, no labor for any other object is right, when it interferes with our nearness to the Saviour.

Those are thus "careful and troubled about many things," who work so hard for their families, that they have no time to read God's word, or pray, or meditate upon the Saviour; who are too busy and excited about current events, to be wrestling with God for a blessing to descend upon the church and the community. They may be Christians as Martha was, and as such may be so anxious to pay off a church debt that they forgot to labor for souls, and are in danger of helping to make the church borrow. They may be so ready to go to church, to Sunday-school, to be at work on the Lord's day, that they have no time for proper, private Sabbath devotion. All these things are right and commendable, when in subordination to the one great matter, when flowing out of a full heart; but Satan is so cunning that we all need the caution of the text, "One thing is needful."

2. Of course there are those who are not even so near the Lord as Martha was, not serving him in anywise, neither zealous nor loving. These are in a far worse condition—in the greatest danger. Yet for them and for us all, one thing is needful, and that is personal love for this personal Lord Jesus Christ. If we have that, then we are safe, then the other duties will at last take their proper place. If not—though we had "the tongues of men and of angels," faith to "remove mountains," though we should give all our "goods to feed the poor," our bodies "to be burned"—it profited nothing. This alone is the "good part." There are no good deeds without this. We can lay up no store of pious labors to take its place. All is in vain to save us, or to win the approval of Him who shall judge us at the last. And why? because Christ is the way—not our morality, our good works; because his life alone, flowing through ours by the bonds of love that unite us to him, transforming us into his image, can make us holy, can give us the passport. The question at the gates of the celestial city will be neither "who

are you?" nor "what have you done?" even for Christ, but "what think ye of Christ?" "For many in that day shall say, Lord, Lord, have we not cast out devils, and in thy name done many mighty works! and he shall say, Depart, I never knew you." Judas seemed most careful for the poor.

Since God is love, and his love to us is the ground of our trust in him, what can be the "one thing needful" for us but love in return—love that leads us to the Saviour's feet to learn of him, that impels therefore to such sacrifice for him, as is told for a memorial of this woman. It is the one thing needful for us, as Christians, that we be not carried away from our steadfastness by the tide of worldliness; the one thing needful for you, who, while often so kind, so zealous, so correct in your views on all other matters, have never heartily responded to that love displayed by Jesus, as he thus mingled with humble people in their earthly cares, and especially as he hung upon the cross to ransom from hell those by nature his enemies. It is the one thing needful for any of us, however vile, however selfish, self-sufficient or unbelieving. It is the "good part," offered to your choice, since God once more promises to give you grace and strength if you will trust in Christ.

3. And it "can not be taken away." Every one can see the excellence of Mary, and understand how much better it was for her, to have the record given in the gospel, than to have been remarkable for wealth or beauty, or household talent. Who would not rather be sure that Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, loves him* or her as he loved this woman, than to have any earthly possession or fame? Perhaps some would not—for many will not choose as she did. Yet was it not the choice of wisdom? If it assures us that she is a saint with God, will it not do as much for us? Those, who thus preferred other things and rejected Christ, are not so honored, even in human esteem. What they prized is gone, perished—but her part is not yet taken away from her. Is it not just so now? Are not all those things which interest and excite us, which absorb our time, and turn our thoughts away from Christ and his love, quite as perishing? Many of them are important for a time and we must not fail in our duty to them, but after all they are fleeting interests. Just now the people of this land were intensely excited by the issue or choice before them.* It was well to be in earnest, and I thank God this day that honest zeal and earnest prayer resulted in a new promise that the nation is appointed for good and not for evil! but after all, even this absorbing matter is one of time. The nation is still in peril, is always in peril, and the fact that some

* Preached immediately after the presidential election, Sunday, Nov. 18th 1864.

you were all activity in securing this blessing to the country, does not give you security even for time, much less for eternity. You may have chosen aright in this minor issue, but what choice have you made in the mere personal, more stupendous issue between heaven and hell, Christ and Satan? All else that you cling to, and are engaged in, may perish, must perish; but he who loves Christ, has eternal possessions, eternal honors, eternal triumphs, has chosen that, which no change of condition, no tumult of the people, no revolution or desolation, not death itself, can destroy—a life “hid with Christ in God.”

Because this is an everlasting treasure, to it all others should be subordinate; because all that we may do for other interests shall perish with them; because, the “many things,” about which we may be “careful and troubled,” forsake us at the grave; we should see to it that we have so heard the Lord’s words, so understood his mission, so appropriated his death, so shared in his sympathy and followed him through self-denial and cross-bearing, that we receive of his grace that “which shall never be taken away from us.”

My Christian friends, there are Marthas and Marys in the church still. There are men and women, who live the lower life of piety; who are indeed true Christians, but needing just the reproof the Saviour gave to this over-careful woman. Some are constitutionally active and zealous in everything they undertake. Let us be sure that, while we are doing with our might what our hands find to do, we are not losing our hold of the Lord, following him “afar off” and seeking to drag others away also. This is our danger to be guarded against by watchfulness and prayer. The higher life is the life that dwells most on the Saviour. The marks of it are not neglect of labor nor want of zeal, for who was more open in her devotion than Mary. Let none suppose they are like her, because they do not like activity in his cause. Once feel true and growing affection for him and we shall not fail of finding and improving opportunities for serving him; but let us take heed that we do not fritter away our energies upon that which is earthly, that we are not over-zealous about the minor, and slothful about the weightier matters. “Looking unto Jesus,” we shall best “run with patience the race set before us.” “Looking” we too shall love. Oh, that God would increase our affection, that the one great concern of all these Christians were the honor of his name, the display of his excellence! Then it would not be in vain that these our unconverted friends were bidden to seek the “one thing needful.”

But, oh my friends, if Martha, a good woman serving the Lord, needed such a rebuke, what of you who are not even so far advanced as she. If she was in danger of being absorbed by

trifles, are not you in a far more dangerous condition, you who do not love the Saviour, who have no interest in aught but what shall perish ! Your pleasure will soon be over, your gayety must end, your possessions must be left behind, your occupation will be gone ; what will you do, when standing before this dear Lord, who thus shows his kindness and tenderness, if you have never loved him. Shame will not be your only portion. When he judges the world, you can not say, "I went to church ; I contributed to all charitable objects ; I was always willing to work for any good cause." That is precisely what he himself condemns in this text, when love is wanting. Choose now, before that fatal hour comes, the good part ; lay hold on the "one thing needful," that is, Christ himself as your Redeemer, Brother and Friend.

SERMON XXIV.

[A SHORT SERMON]

MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY.

"Men ought always to pray, and not faint."—LUKE xviii: 1.

FROM this instructive parable of our Saviour, we are taught :

1. That *men* ought to pray: Some people seem to think that they are excusable for neglecting to pray, as they do not profess religion, and as they have never promised to pray. But our Divine Master makes no exceptions. He does not say, or intimate that there is any class of men, or any individual man or woman, that is excused from praying. He says, plainly, that *men*, that is, *all men*—all mankind—(embracing every man and every woman of the human family,) ought to pray. *Every human being*, therefore, no matter what his circumstances, his condition, his relations, his professions, or his business, *ought to pray*.

2. Men *ought* to pray. Men are not at liberty to pray, or neglect prayer, as they please. If they cast off fear, and restrain prayer, they not only injure themselves, but displease their Sovereign. Christ says, they *ought* to pray. They are placed under *obligations* to pray. If they neglect prayer, therefore, they incur fearful guilt—they violate an obligation to their Maker. They *ought* to pray, and if they do not pray, they fail of doing as they *ought* ; and must answer for that failure to their Judge. No matter what plausible excuses they may frame for neglecting prayer, they will not satisfy him, who has said that they *ought* to pray.

3. Men ought *always* to pray. It is not enough for men to pray Sabbath days, or in days of trouble and affliction and danger. It is not enough for men to pray in seasons of revival, and of animal excitement. It is not enough for men to pray night and morning, and that too in bed. It is not enough for heads of families to pray in their closets, or to pray in their families only on the Sabbath. Men ought *always* to pray. While they pray punctually in their closets, and in their families, and in the prayer-meeting, they ought also to keep themselves in a praying frame the whole time. They can then "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting."

4. Men ought always *to pray*. It is not enough that men, like little children, *say their prayers*. They ought to *pray*. They ought to *express their own desires*. They ought to pray as the prophet Elijah, and the patriarch Jacob, and king Hezekiah, and the woman of Canaan, and Bartimeus, and the importunate widow prayed. They ought to pray the inwrought, fervent prayer of the righteous.

INFERENCES.

1. If men did as they *ought*, there would be no prayerless persons in the world.
2. If *men always prayed*, there would be no swearing, or Sabbath-breaking, or drunkenness, or lewdness, or oppression, or dishonesty, or injustice, or war on the earth.
3. If men always prayed, they would always be happy themselves; and would always be seeking to make all others happy.
4. If men always prayed, God would always bless them, with all needed temporal and spiritual blessings, through our Lord Jesus Christ.